

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

THE ENCLOSURE OF EXTWISTLE MOOR

In the early 19th century, Extwistle Moor stood as a vast expanse of land, its boundary extending from Extwistle Mill to Monk Hall farm. Life on the moor was rugged and challenging, particularly for the working classes who struggled to find employment during a period of severe economic downturn known as "Dole time."

The year was 1825, and the air was heavy with hunger and desperation. The scarcity of work left families impoverished and famished. The price of flour soared to exorbitant levels, forcing the handloom weavers, among others, to survive on meager portions of barley porridge. These dark days were aptly dubbed "Barley time."

Amidst this bleak landscape, a young essayist, his thoughts filled with memories of the past, stood before an audience. He surveyed the respectable and well-fed gathering before him, reflecting on the stark contrast to the clog-wearing, porridge-consuming population of his childhood.

The essayist recounted the hardships endured by his own family, who struggled to provide for their numerous children. Blue milk, so thin it resembled water, was their daily sustenance. Meal porridge became a monotonous staple, consumed twenty-one times a week if the meal lasted. A pair of new clogs, ironed around the sides, was considered a luxury—a symbol of relative prosperity in those challenging times.

Yet, the essayist emphasized that their plight was not unique; it was a shared experience across the entire country. The dire conditions of "Dole time" affected countless families, leaving them with empty stomachs and little hope for a brighter future. The essayist spoke not only of his own struggles but also appealed to the collective memory of the audience, urging them to bear witness to the truth he shared.

As he concluded his speech, the essayist expressed gratitude that those days of hardship were now in the past. The audience, with their well-fed bodies and neatly dressed attire, nodded in agreement. The years had brought progress and prosperity, freeing them from the shackles of hunger and destitution. They shared in the essayist's hope that such times would never resurface, and that future generations would be spared the suffering they once endured.

With a sense of relief and renewed determination, the gathering dispersed, carrying with them the collective memory of "Barley time." They walked away, grateful for the comforts they enjoyed and vowing to cherish the progress that had been made. And as the enclosures of Extwistle Moor stood as a reminder of their shared history, they moved forward, guided by the belief that the past should never be forgotten, and the future should always be a beacon of hope.

By Donald Jay